

Intercultural Integration in the Arab Gulf States

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper explores the heightened challenges international students face in Arab Gulf States, such as cultural and language barriers and acculturative anxiety, and examines the role of psychological capital in their academic adjustment.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: The study utilizes a cross-sectional design, collecting data from 303 international students in Arab Gulf States via an adopted questionnaire. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be applied to analyze the relationship between psychological capital and academic adjustment.

Findings: Preliminary expectations suggest that higher levels of psychological capital may significantly enhance academic adjustment, helping international students better manage the unique challenges encountered in the Arab Gulf educational context.

Research Limitations/Implications: While providing valuable insights, the findings are limited to the specific socio-cultural and educational settings of the Arab Gulf States and may not be generalizable to other regions. The cross-sectional design also restricts the ability to infer causality.

Practical and Social Implications: The study underscores the need for targeted support systems in Gulf States' educational institutions to bolster the psychological capital of international students, thereby facilitating smoother academic and cultural integration.

Originality/Value: This paper contributes to the limited but growing body of literature on the academic adjustment of international students in the Gulf region, highlighting the critical role of psychological capital. It offers pragmatic solutions aimed at enhancing their educational experience and overall well-being in a foreign academic environment.

Keywords: *Arab Gulf States, academic adjustment, psychological capital, international students*

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1. Introduction

The Arabian Gulf countries' culture involves a complex mixture of religious and cultural principles (Jubran, Horenczyk and Benet-Martinez, 2020) It's a challenging experience for international students to adapt a new country, its culture, and its education system. Intercultural academic adjustment is about learning to adapt, alter, change, or adjust to cultural differences. Several studies on the topic of international students' cultural adjustments found that when international students interact with hosts socially, the possibility to develop skills and behaviors that can help them to adjust to their new environment (Al Murshidi, 2014). The obstacles that are confronted to the international students include, different academic system, academic pressure, difference in cultures and moreover, language barriers in the education system (Sam et al., 2013).

Some of the Gulf nations are inviting foreign students to their country to enable further economic growth outside the oil sector and create a competitive knowledge-based economy. UAE has treated education as a top priority for quite some time and managed to attract good number of students from neighboring countries like India, Pakistan, Iran, UK and US etc. This prioritization is reflected in the UAE's current strategic education plan for 2017-2021, which seeks to raise the upper-secondary graduation rate to 98 percent. (Kevin, 2018). Similarly other oil-rich Persian Gulf monarchies like Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia are attracting many international students.

Some students enter universities in these countries equipped with cognitive and psychological resources that sustain them in effectively coping with the challenges they encounter; others struggle to adjust to the peculiarities and requirements of the academic environment, hence are frequently prone to stress and anxiety (Gerdes and Mallinckrodt, 1994). The attrition of students in higher education institutions is always a concern for the administration of Universities and colleges. Some of the studies reveal that more than 40% of all college entrants leave education without earning a degree, 75% of these students drop out in the first 2 years of college, and an institution can expect that 56% of a typical entering class cohort will not graduate from that college (Gerdes and Mallinckordt, 1994). This study is different from previous studies as this study is conducted on the GCC countries. This paper attempts to highlight the experiences and challenges of international students studying in Arabian Gulf nations. This research also pinpoints PsyCap's

ability to moderate the influence of academic stress in the development of psychological and physical symptoms (Kim, Oja, Kim, and Chin, 2020).

2. Literature Review

Liran and Miller are of the opinion that the academic adjustment of students can be measured from four distinct domains such as academic achievements, social adjustment, personal emotional adjustment and institutional adjustment in their work, the role of psychological capital in academic adjustment among university students, published in 2019 in the journal of happiness studies. The first domain, academic achievement is grounded in students' motivation, the appropriateness of their study skills to particular study requirements and their ability to earn satisfactory grades. The second domain, social adjustment stands for students' involvement in their study environment including their ability to establish social networks. The third domain, personal emotional adjustment reflects students' psychological and physical conditions. It is indicative of their self-perception and represents their coping with study-related challenges that lead to the arousal of stress and anxiety. The fourth domain, institutional adjustment is revealing how students feel about their relation to academy, in general, and to their academic environment.

Nasir (2012) in his study, Effects of cultural adjustment on academic achievement of international students found that international students deal with several adjustment problems in a new social, psychological and academic environment. Church (1982) in his study titled Sojourner adjustment and Tseng & Newton (2002) in their paper, International student's strategies for well-being found that, international students' academic difficulties resulted in motivation and social or emotional problems, new social regulation that impact on their academic achievement.

Tinto (1993), Tamerie (1997) and Chong et al ., (2009) indicated that international students' better adjustment has a positive effect on students' academic success. The problems faced by international students is more or less common in adapting to the new learning environment in foreign countries such as general living adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment, personal psychological adjustment, and academic adjustment (lin and Yi, 1997; Tseng and Newton, 2002). Students face difficulties in achieving their goals and expectations, psychological factors become hurdle in achieving academic adjustment (Anderson and Koc, 2016; Kanu, 2008). This study examined the relationship between psychological capital (PsyCap) and academic adjustment in

University students as a critical factor underpinning academic success. PsyCap is a core construct reflecting individuals' positive psychological state of development (luthans 2002; luthans et al 2004; luthans and Youssef 2004). This can be conceptualized into four capacities, (1) Self-efficacy; the confidence to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed in performing challenging tasks; (2) Optimism: a positive attribution about succeeding now and in the future; (3) hope: preserving toward goals, and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals in order to succeed; (4) resiliency: the ability to bounce back and even beyond when confronted with problems and adversity in order to attain success (luthans, 2007 & liran and Miller, 2019).

The evidence from the research conducted in relation to satisfaction, production and well-being within management and at the organizational level among the employees. The research indeed shows a positive link across these three domains (Avey et al, 2010; Culbertson et al, 2010; Liran & Miller 2019; Luthans et al, 2007). Surprisingly however, studies on the contribution of PsyCap to the wellbeing and academic achievements of University students are so far rare. Some investigated the relation of PsyCap to students' grade point average (GPA) (luthans et al, 2012; Vanno et al, 2014). Findings suggest that PsyCap serves as a positive predictor of students' GPA where students with higher levels of PsyCap show higher GPA, and vice versa. However, Walberg's theory of academic achievement shows that immediate psychological environments and psychological factors of academic students can influence student's educational results (Reynolds & Walberg, 1992). So, the present study develops theoretical framework base on Walberg's theory of academic achievement.

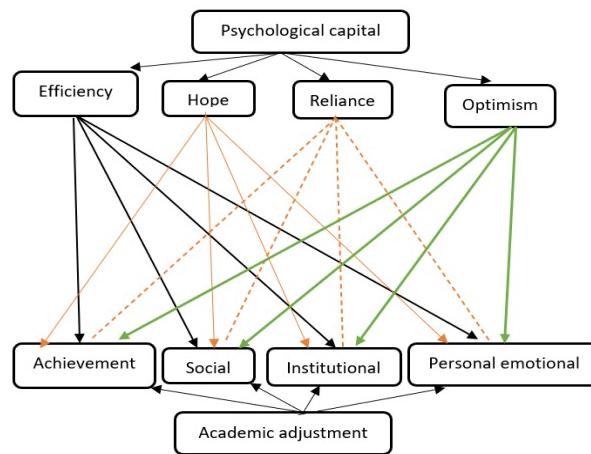


Figure 1.1: Theoretical Framework/

3. Research Methodology

2.1 Participants

Data will be collected from international students studying in Arab *Gulf States*. However, comparative analysis is not possible as the data from 6 states were not equally received. For a representative sample, three hundred three participants will be selected from a wide range of country (see Table 1)

Distribution of Participants by GC Country and University (Sample 303)

| Country | University/Level of Degree | Number of Respondents | Percent |
|---------------------|--|-----------------------|---------|
| Bahrain | Arabian Gulf University (Bachelor) | 4 | 4.290 |
| | AMA International University of Bahrain (Bachelor) | 9 | |
| Kuwait | University of Glasgow (Bachelor+ master student) | 17 | 8.580 |
| | The American School of Kuwait (Pre-K-12 etc) | 19 | |
| Saudi Arabia | Pakistan International School Jeddah (class X-XII) | 47 | 16.831 |
| | The British International School, Riyadh (Year 10 to 13 and foundation students) | 32 | |
| | Alfaisal University | 5 | |
| | Al Yamamah University (Bachelor) | 4 | |
| Qatar | Qatar University (Bachelor) | 3 | 17.821 |
| | Pakistan International School Qatar (Class X,XI and XII) | 51 | |
| Oman | Nizwa University (Bachelor) | 7 | 13.861 |
| | Pakistan School (Branch Nizwa, Slala, Muscat, Sohar) (Class X,XI and XII) | 71 | |
| | Indian School (Branch Muscat & Nizwa)(Class VIII to XII) | 35 | |
| | University of Birmingham Dubai (Bachelor + Others) | 6 | |
| United Arab Emirate | United Arab Emirates University(Bachelor + Others) | 3 | 2.970 |
| | Total | 303 | |

2.2 Instruments

Demographic information is asked in section 1.

Psychological Capital. The questionnaire on Psychological Capital that was used in this study is a modified Hebrew version of the questionnaire by Luthans *et.al.* ,(2007), which was found to be

highly reliable by Liran, & Miller, (2019). This test contains twenty-four (24) items, that is generally developed to measure the following: Self-Efficacy, Hope, Optimism and Reliance with respect to strengths and academic outcomes. A five-point Likert scale was utilized where “1” is Strongly Disagree; “2” Disagree; “3” Somewhat Agree; “4” Agree and “5” is Strongly Agree. The items on Self-Efficacy which measures the respondent’s self-confidence that is related to long-term problems, achievement of goals and targets were the following item numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. On the other hand, the items on Hope measures the goals set by the respondents. The following items are: 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. The items on Optimism that measures uncertainty of things are the following items: 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. Lastly, Reliance is related to the respondents dealing with the difficulties in their studies and the items are the following: 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24.

Academic Adjustment Questionnaire: The Academic Adjustment questionnaire developed by Baker and Siryk (1989) was utilized in this study which measures four specific areas of academic adjustment namely the academic achievements, social skills, personal and emotional well-being and satisfaction in their academic institution. This test has been shortened and modified in Hebrew version of the Students adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) which was found to be highly reliable according to Liran, Amp and Miller (2019). Moreover, the content of the test was partly modified to suit the needs of the university students in the Gulf region specifically Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. The questions on the following items: 1, 4, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, and 26 and the scales used are reversed respectively. On the other hand, the questions from item numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 are related to academic achievement that measures the student’s difficulties in academic related activities. The following items 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 assessed the student’s social skills related to inter-connectedness with other students. Moreover, the following items: 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 are related to personal and emotional well-being of students that measures the students’ stress, moods, emotions, etc. The item numbers: 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28 measures the students’ satisfaction with their academic institution.

Analysis: Present study will use the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through PLS.

5. Conclusion

This study has delineated the significant influence of psychological capital on the academic adjustment of international students in the Arab Gulf States, identifying it as a pivotal asset in navigating cultural, linguistic, and acculturative challenges. By demonstrating that enhanced psychological capital correlates with better academic integration, this research underscores its potential as a lever for policy and intervention within educational systems. Emphasizing the cultivation of resilience, optimism, hope, and self-efficacy could substantially improve the experiences and outcomes of international students, thereby enriching the academic community in the Gulf region.

6. Research Limitations/Implications

The insights provided by this study, while valuable, come with limitations due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, which constrains the ability to establish causality between psychological capital and academic adjustment. Additionally, the findings are contextual to the specific socio-cultural environment of the Arab Gulf States, limiting their generalizability to other settings. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs to more accurately track changes in psychological capital and its impacts over time, as well as comparative studies across different cultural contexts to broaden the applicability of the results.

7. Future Research Directions

To build on the findings of this study, future research should consider longitudinal approaches to more effectively capture the dynamics of psychological capital and its impact on academic adjustment over time. Expanding the scope to include comparative analyses between different regions could also offer a broader understanding of cultural influences on international students' experiences. Additionally, investigating the specific components of psychological capital that most significantly affect academic success could help in developing targeted interventions tailored to the unique needs of international students across various educational landscapes.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests of a financial or personal nature that could have influenced the outcome or interpretation of the research.

Authors' contributions

The authors are equally contributed to full paper.

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Data Availability

This article is a review, and as such, it does not contain any new data collected by the authors. All sources of data are duly cited within the manuscript.

Code Availability (Software Application or Custom Code):

Not applicable

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